Fact Sheet

US-VISIT is a top priority for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security because it enhances security for our citizens and visitors while facilitating legitimate travel and trade across our borders. US-VISIT helps to secure our borders, facilitate the entry and exit process, and enhance the integrity of the immigration system while respecting the privacy of our visitors.

US-VISIT is part of a continuum of security measures that begins overseas and continues through a visitor's arrival to and departure from the United States. It incorporates eligibility determinations made by both the Departments of Homeland Security and State.

In those cases where a visa is issued by the Department of State, biometrics such as digital, inkless fingerscans and digital photographs allow the Department of Homeland Security to determine whether the person applying for entry to the United States is the same person who was issued the visa by the Department of State. Additionally, the biometric and biographic data are checked against watchlists, improving the Department of Homeland Security's ability to make admissibility decisions as well as the Department of State's ability to make visa determinations.

US-VISIT currently applies to all visitors (with limited exemptions) holding non-immigrant visas, regardless of country of origin.

By September 30, 2004, US-VISIT procedures will be expanded to include visitors traveling to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) arriving at air and sea ports of entry. See Appendix A for a list of the countries in the Visa Waiver Program.

An extension is being sought to an October 26, 2004 deadline set in the Enhanced Border Security Act of 2002 for countries in the VWP to certify that they have programs in place to issue their nationals machine-readable passports that incorporate biometric identifiers that comply with standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). According to the mandate, any passport issued on or after October 26, 2004, must be an ICAO-compliant travel document that uses biometrics, if the bearer applies for admission into the United States under the VWP.

Due to technical challenges, few countries will be able to meet that October 26, 2004 deadline. Therefore, a two-year extension is being requested to make it possible for countries to comply with this mandate.

US-VISIT entry procedures are currently in place at 115 airports and 14 seaports. By December 31, 2004, US-VISIT will be expanded to the 50 busiest land ports of entry and to all 165 land ports entry by December 31, 2005.

THE GOALS OF US-VISIT ARE TO:

- Enhance the security of U.S. citizens and visitors
- Facilitate legitimate travel and trade
- Ensure the integrity of the immigration system
- Safeguard the personal privacy of visitors

HOW IT WORKS

<u>PRE-ENTRY:</u>

- Visitors applying for a visa have their information reviewed before they enter the United States. Both the Departments of Homeland Security and State play a role in determining the eligibility of a visitor to receive a visa.

<u>ENTRY:</u>

- Many of the entry procedures in place today at air and seaports remain unchanged and are familiar to international visitors. When a visitor arrives through an air or seaport, they are enrolled in US-VISIT as part of the primary inspection process. Once land border processing is operational, if the visitor arrives with a visa through a land border they will be enrolled in US-VISIT at the secondary inspection area. (This does not initially apply to those Mexicans who use their Border Crossing Cards for trips under 72 hours and within the 25-mile border zone.)

- The new, inkless digital "fingerscanner" is easy to use. Visitors first put the left index finger, then the right index finger on a glass plate that electronically captures their fingerscans.

- Visitors will also look into a camera and their digital picture will be taken.

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers will review travel documents and ask questions about the visitor's stay in the United States.

- The biometric enhancements to the entry procedures add minimal time to the process – an average of 15 seconds in most cases.

- Biometric identifiers also protect our visitors by making it virtually impossible for anyone else to claim their identity should their biometrically-enhanced travel documents (such as a visa) be stolen or duplicated.

STATUS MANAGEMENT:

- Should a visitor seek to adjust status or extend his/her stay, US-VISIT would be updated with any modifications to the individual's status.

EXIT:

- US-VISIT is testing and evaluating departure confirmation alternatives. The tests and evaluation will continue in 2004. Ultimately, all visitors will be required to check-out before leaving the United States.

- Currently, US-VISIT has departure confirmation kiosks in two locations: Baltimore Washington International Airport and Miami International Cruise Line Terminal. Only visitors leaving from either of these locations must check-out using the automated, self-service kiosk. At the departure kiosk, visitors will scan their travel documents and repeat the digital "fingerscanning" process on the inkless device. Attendants are available to assist departing visitors.

- Currently, visitors with a visa who depart from a port where the departure confirmation system is in place must comply. By September 30, 2004, visitors traveling to the United States under the VWP will also need to check out before leaving the United States. This exit confirmation information will be added to the visitor's travel records to demonstrate compliance and record the individual's status for future visits to the United States.

- US-VISIT compares arrival and departure biographical manifest data provided by the airlines and cruise lines to know when someone entered and exited the country.

APPLICABILITY TO VISITORS TRAVELING UNDER THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

- Countries in the VWP are unable to issue passports that include biometric identifiers by the October 26, 2004 deadline set by law.

- To further the goals of DHS to secure our borders while facilitating legitimate travel and trade, it will require visitors from VWP countries to be processed through the US-VISIT system at airports and sea ports of entry by September 30, 2004.

- The US-VISIT procedures are simple, clean and fast; collecting the biometrics takes less than 15 seconds.

RESPECTING PRIVACY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- The Department of Homeland Security safeguards the biometric and biographic information provided by travelers and ensures that their privacy interests are not violated. US-VISIT records will be protected in a manner consistent with all applicable privacy laws and regulations. Personal information will be kept secure and confidential and will not be discussed with or disclosed to any person within or outside the US-VISIT program other than as authorized by law and as required for the performance of official duties. Careful safeguards, including appropriate security controls, will ensure that the data is not used or accessed improperly. Visitors who feel they are in need of recourse on privacy issues can contact the US-VISIT Privacy Officer, who will address individual issues.

- US-VISIT has published a Privacy Impact Assessment that ensures that personal information is used appropriately, protected from misuse and improper disclosure, and destroyed when no longer needed. This will be updated as necessary.

- Environmental assessments have been completed for air and seaports and it has been determined that there are no significant impacts as a result of US-VISIT.

TIMING AND DELIVERY

- The Department of Homeland Security has met the December 31, 2003 Congressional deadline to have in place an entry/exit program that strengthens security and facilitates travel for legitimate visitors while respecting their privacy and our environment.

- The Department of Homeland Security met Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge's deadline to implement technology that will collect and match biometric information (digital "fingerscans" and photos) of foreign nationals required to obtain a visa to enter the United States at the air and seaport primary inspection locations.

- A Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued in November 2003 to engage the private sector to help the US-VISIT program office identify the optimum solution for exit and entry systems at land borders. Proposals were received in January 2004 and the contract will be awarded in May 2004.

- Visitors traveling under the VWP will be enrolled in US-VISIT at air and sea ports of entry by September 30, 2004.

- VWP travelers will be enrolled in US-VISIT at the nation's 50 busiest land ports of entry beginning December 31, 2004.

- VWP travelers will be enrolled at the nation's 115 remaining land border crossings beginning December 31, 2005.

- The US-VISIT program received $367 million for FY 03 and has been appropriated $340 million for FY 04. A spending plan was submitted to the GAO and both appropriations committees have approved it.

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APPENDIX A

<div style="text-align: center;">**Countries in the Visa Waiver Program**</div>

Andorra	Monaco
Austria	Netherlands
Australia	New Zealand
Belgium	Norway
Brunei	Portugal
Denmark	San Marino
Finland	Singapore
France	Slovenia
Germany	Spain
Iceland	Sweden
Ireland	
Italy	
Japan	
Liechtenstein	
Luxembourg	
Switzerland	

United Kingdom (For citizens with the unrestricted right of permanent abode in England Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.)